

TEMPORARY GALLERY

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ROLL OVER. REFLECTIONS ON DOCUMENTARY, AFTER RICHARD LEACOCK

YTO BARRADA + DUNCAN CAMPBELL + JAN DIETVORST / ROY VILLEVOYE +
RICHARD LEACOCK + LUKE FOWLER / ANNA MCLAUHLAN + FERNANDO
SÁNCHEZ CASTILLO + HIROFUMI SUDA

Curated by Bianca Visser, Utrecht, in cooperation with mit Regina Barunke, Temporary
Gallery

"Roll Over. Reflections on Documentary, after Richard Leacock" is a tribute to the lifelong commitment to the development of cinematography by British-American filmmaker Richard Leacock (London, 1921 - Paris, 2011). His aspiration to get closer to reality and the methodology he developed to accomplish this aim, influenced filmography as we know it today. By the end of the 1950's he came up with an elegant solution to improve the cumbersome mechanism that enabled the synchronization of image and sound. Thanks to the unconditional support of friend and business partner Robert Drew, the innovative contributions made by Donn Pennebaker and the skills of technician Otto Koppelka, a device was manufactured that met the requirements of a silent, unobtrusive and portable camera. The invention allowed filmmakers to roam the streets and film situations as they were taking place, resulting in a series of documentaries that were informal, nonjudgmental and unrehearsed. Hence roots the name direct cinema. Although the group of filmmakers gathered by Leacock performed as a collective, his signature is unmistakably recognizable in the films produced in this period and in his later work. He is reluctant to express personal opinions, unwilling to impose an imperative order on the world. His task is to offer the big picture, so that the viewer can form his own opinion. Few details escaped his keep eye. He got hold of paradoxes and everyday inconsistencies that are easily overlooked and was able to arrange the scenes he had witnessed into a coherent story. Much has changed throughout the past decades. With the emergence of video and Final Cut Pro, film has become accessible, affordable and manageable. Not only is its use widespread, it has been adopted as an art form practiced by growing number of artists. Seven inquisitive contemporary creators have been invited to participate in "Roll Over", showing their work alongside that of Leacock, whose films have seldom been shown in public. In this way, the exposition wants to bring forth new understandings of documentary, not only as an informative medium but also as a way to shape the world.

With "Hand-Me Downs" (2011) French-Moroccan artist **Yto Barrada** introduces us into her family background through 16 myths that have been handed down to her orally. These embellished descriptions of past events are narrated over everyday scenes shot in Morocco in the period between 1950 and 1970. The footage has been extracted from silent Super 8 and 16 mm the artist acquired on flea-markets and in second hand stores. Although the stories contain elements that can only be the result of a vivid imagination, they also transmit feelings of joy, of solidarity, but also of a fear that never comes out openly.

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Duncan Campbell analyzes past events through footage he gathers from publicly accessible archives. With these sequences, he composes a documentary that offers an unconventional look into the subject he has chosen to portray. He does what Richard Leacock was very much against during his lifetime. Campbell is not only dealing with situations he hasn't experienced first hand, but he also turns to a habit that was common before 1960, when documentaries were basically re-enactments of real situations. The main reason was that the equipment available was heavy and clumsy, but it was also easier and less time-consuming to stage the sequences scripted beforehand. Following in their footpath, Campbell recreates missing fragments and he also introduces material shot for other purposes that illustrate information he wants to convey. In the film "Make it new John" (2009) the filmmaker has used this resource to reconstruct the youth of the main character in the film, entrepreneur John DeLorean, and to sketch the frenzy that came along with the introduction of the automobile as a status symbol and as the embodiment of the American Dream. An actual rendering of the events, using available footage used for newsreels and other programs, follows this reconstruction. From a journalistic point of views, the interventions made by the artist are totally unacceptable, but it does call into question the authority photography has and the necessity of a contextualization. The film is a mesmerizing account of what can happen when ideals blend with individual interests.

In over a decade, visual artists **Jan Dietvorst and Roy Villevoye** have collaborated on a regular basis, producing a consistent array of films. It all started when they travelled to the remote settlement of the Asmat people, an ethnic group living in Papua New Guinea, in 1998. Villevoye had visited this „hunter-gatherer society“ more often before, but for Dietvorst it was the first encounter with a culture that has managed to remain relatively free from foreign interference. Instead of approaching the Asmat as a noble savage or as an anthropological subject in the classical sense, the filmmakers have managed to gain access to these people from the basis of mutual respect. During this period, however, they also made a series of films in a place located closer to home. The French region of Verdun was the scene of one of the most horrifying battles that took place during the First World War. Until this very day, the fields and woods in the area are still covered with trails of the grievous atrocities that happened here nearly a century ago. To get a more precise understanding of what war means and what kind of consequences it brings about, the filmmakers decided to follow the steps of amateur archaeologist and historian Jean Paul de Vries. This slightly introvert, but very sensitive and dedicated man, has committed his fate to that of the young and inexperienced soldiers that perished on the battlefield, whom he strongly identifies with. "After the Battle" (2012) is a compilation of the three films Dietvorst and Villevoye dedicated to the subject. This is the very first public presentation of this extraordinary account, in which fantasy and make-believe become the source of a fascinating journey into our human inclination to react in a complex emotional way towards inexplicable situations.

Glasgow based, Japanese artist **Hirofumi Suda** is a skilled sampler. He works across a wide range of media that include painting, photography, installation art and film. Made especially for the occasion of this exhibit, "listen to the wind" (2013) is a patchwork, in which fragments have been pieced together into a larger design. In general, a documentary film tends to develop from a particular topic, which leads up to a story. This methodology helps focus the attention, but it also means that the results have to be consistent with the subject. Hirofumi

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Suda has chosen not to restrict his liberty in this way. He has given himself the freedom to film whatever grabs his attention. The images and the sounds have been recorded in Scotland, in Turkey and in Japan, following Richard Leacock's desire to capture everything that is beautiful and inspiring, knowing that you might never encounter such wonders again. Formal analogies, recurring patterns and impossible combinations, inspiring viewers to create countless stories, guide Hirofumi's decisions. The film has been produced thanks to the generous support of Creative Scotland.

"Hickory Hill" (1968) is a short film **Richard Leacock** shot at the residency of the late Robert Kennedy. Each spring, the young members of the family, their friends and neighbours come together to celebrate the annual Pet Show. The excitement prevails amongst the pet owners, who are eager to win the much sought-after prizes. Everybody is having a wonderful time, except Kennedy's dog „Broomis“ that is not amused by the hustle caused by the children and their noisy companions.

The human inclination towards supernatural powers is pivotal to the portrait Leacock made, together with filmmaker Marisa Silver, of a Christian family living in the midlands of the US. Titled "Community of Praise" (1981), the film begins with a scene in which the youngest offspring, a 11 year old boy, cuts himself badly fiddling with an electric knife-sharpener. His mother sensibly takes him to the doctor to be cured. Back home, the camera follows the family members while they accomplish daily routines. Gradually we learn that there is something odd. We find out that the matrimony has gone through tough times. There was booze, aggressive behaviour and desperation. Religion has become something they can hold on to. During a visit to the parish, a strange ritual is carried out. All the family members fall into a trance, guided by the priest, who is determined to exorcise demons from their human body. The story unfolds as if it was a feature movie, but during the ritual, the feeling that something very real is taking place overwhelms the viewer. Something surpasses the realm of reason.

Leacock witnessed on various occasions a situation in which an innocent game turns into an upsetting experience that becomes genuinely real. One such incident is included in this exhibit. It is a famous fragment from the chaotic and absurd movie "Maidstone" (1970), directed and scripted by Norman Mailer. The notorious writer knew Leacock from the time they studied together at Harvard University. When Mailer decided to make "Maidstone", he turned to him and asked if he would be his cameraman. It was a bizarre plan. The film was shot in five days, using a practically inexistent script, involving real actors and amateurs that improvised on the set. It took two years to complete the film that was finally released in 1970. Their versions of what exactly happened that day differ. Leacock was strolling about the fields surrounding Mailer's house with his camera, when actor Rip Torn appeared in sight, grabbed a hammer with which he struck Mailer on the head. The men get entangled in a fight, in which Mailer nearly rips off Torn's ear. Some believe this scene was staged beforehand. Sceptics adduce that it is suspicious that Leacock was still holding onto the camera when shooting had officially ended. Those who know him, know that he always had a camera with him. It is possible that the idea to attack Mailer was plotted beforehand, but the blood running from the actor's ear is real and the children of Mailer are genuinely in despair. There is a curious moment when the actors stop using the name of the character they interpret in the film

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and start calling each other by their real name. Watching these scenes, the public will be able to decide for themselves what to believe, or not to believe.

An act that should be simple and straightforward is turned inside out and upside down, torn apart and reassembled in the film "Paddington Collaboration" (2007), created by British artists **Luke Fowler and Anna McLauchlan**. The scene is set in a London flat and the target is to document the journey down the stairs, on to the street, which derives into the question if they are ever going to make it. The journey could have been rendered in one single shot, but the situation gets complicated. McLauchlan pictures Fowler in different stages of the trail, in the same way travellers picture themselves in remote places to give proof that they have actually gone where they claim to have been. The voice-over reads a detailed description of the place with absurd preciseness. The question is what is it that they are trying to convey?

"Keep Shoppin'" (2012) was shot in the city of Kassel, during the last edition of the Documenta. **Fernando Sánchez Castillo** was visiting the exhibit, when his attention fell upon a banner displayed around the "Occupy Kassel" camp that had been installed at the Friedrichsplatz. Instantly, he decided to send a friend over to buy the flag, while he recorded the negotiations with his iPhone. In this very simple way, this recording questions the purpose of faded ideals in the struggle to improve human conditions. This is an example of what Leacock would call "to steal the observable".

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Events to the exhibition:

16.02.2013

Artist Talk with Hirofumi Suda and Bianca Visser (ENG)

Glasgow based, Japanese artist **Hirofumi Suda** will explain the process that led to the creation of "Listen To the Wind", a film specially produced for the exposition "Roll Over. Reflections on Documentary, after Richard Leacock". The artist and the curator of the exposition, Bianca Visser, talked about Richard Leacock for the first time in July 2010. One of the subjects they exchanged views on during the conversations that followed, is the relationship the filmmaker established with the surrounding environment. Robert J. Flaherty, who Leacock considered his mentor, told him to remain constantly alert and to film anything unusual that captured his sight. As soon as he noticed something extraordinarily beautiful, he should forget what he was doing and render this moment before it was gone. This is how Leacock learned that things that might seem trivial at first, could become meaningful in a later stadium. During the artist talk, Hirofumi Suda will explain how this methodology fits into his personal trajectory and how it influenced the production of "listen to the wind". Hirofumi Suda graduated in 2009 at the Glasgow School of Arts as Master of Fine Arts. He has been a resident at the CCA creative lab, Glasgow, and at the Banff Centre, Alberta/Canada, where he followed a program developed by art critic Jan Verwoert. His work has been shown in various Scottish art centres, including 2012 Transmission Gallery, Glasgow. "listen to the wind" was produced thanks to the generous of Creative Scotland.

21.03.2013

Conversation between Valérie Lalonde and Bianca Visser (ENG)

Valérie Lalonde met Richard Leacock in Paris after retiring as head of the Film Department at the MIT in 1989. Together they filmed "Les Œufs à la Coque" (1991), a delightful travelogue that praises the small things in life. They went on filming, forming an accomplished team, both professional and in the private sphere. Leacock is known as one of the fathers of "direct cinema", a documentary genre that introduced a new way of filming. In 1960 he and his colleagues casted tripods, microphone poles and lights and other paraphernalia aside, so that they were able to move their way into the real world. Bearing a relatively small hand-held synch-sound camera, they were able to film aspects of life that had never been rendered before. That is how we are now able to get a closer look into the lives of, amongst others, the young Kennedys (Hickory Hill, 1968) and a religious family from Indiana (Community of Praise, 1981), on display in the exhibit. Before moving to Paris, Richard Leacock had mainly worked with celluloid film. As professor he developed a synch sound super-8 device that would be economically and practically accessible for the general public. His plan was intercepted by the emergence of video that made film obsolete. In "Les Œufs à la Coque", Leacock and Lalonde mark the death of film and praise the hegemony of video. During the conversation at Temporary Gallery, Valérie Lalonde and Bianca Visser will look back on the influence innovation exercised on the development of Leacock's career, at a moment in time in which celluloid film is definitively on the verge of disappearing.